A Testimony

I came to my first prayer meeting in January 1968, somewhat by accident though in the eyes of God I'm sure this was no accidental encounter for it has changed the entire direction of my life. I attended the University of Michigan as a graduate student in English literature and planned to teach. This January night, since I had returned early from Christmas vacation, I found myself alone in an empty apartment with nothing to do, bored and looking for something. I went over to the Catholic Student Center and talked to a friend awhile but kept getting more and more bored until another friend dropped in. He stayed a few minutes then got up to leave. I asked, "Where are you going, Jim?" When he replied "To a prayer meeting" I said, "Can I go with you?" Had he been going to tame lions or to kick snow on a tree I would have gone - such was my emptiness. But happily he wasn't and I thank God deeply for sending him along. I went off unprepared (except for the great void in my heart which God was about to fill) and don't think I even asked such a basic question as "what is a prayer meeting"

Entering a small apartment located over a drugstore I found about ten people, only one other girl, seated casually singing psalms. As I took a place on the floor someone handed me a songsheet and I joined in on psalm 131 with its refrain, "Israel, rely on Yahweh now and forever more." I felt completely relaxed and at home as people prayed out loud and shared stories of how the Lord had helped them on various occasions on their vacations - selecting Christmas presents, healing colds, easing strained family relationships. After the prayer meeting ended and ~~as~~ some of us sat drinking coffee and eating cookies, a few people went off to another room. I heard them pray again and this time the singing was in a language I didn't understand. Someone told me, "He's singing in tongues," and I replied, "I know." It seemed so natural so uninhibited and free - no tinge of strangeness

and nothing to be afraid of. And I, who had questioned and doubted everything, from algebra to faith, consistently; never even thought to question. When Jim asked me later what I thought I recalled so many of my acquaintances who knew everything about religion and yet didn't know religion as these people lived it and I said, "whatever they have, I want it."

I continued to go to prayer meetings twice a week and soon asked my friends there to pray with me for the Baptism of the Spirit. Soon, I too, began to pray in tongues and found a great release in yielding abandonment to God's love, in abandoning my heart and mind to Him. In the weeks afterward I wanted to pray and came to restructure my life around one overwhelming reality: that I give myself to God to use as he wished that the Gospel be proclaimed to every man woman and child, everywhere. I spent hours poring over Scripture - now read as God's words to me, and was frequently kicked out of the library when it closed at midnight while I dug out references and cross references in varying translations of the Bible. I began to find prayer and silence more intriguing than bars and movies and found also that my despair and boredom were yielding to the hope that God's love would transform my heart and the hardness of society.

After finishing my MA, I continued to live in Ann Arbor and worked with several other young people to form a community serving the university students in helping them find God. It was a good year, one of growth, and yet very difficult. There were so many to serve, so much organization, so many meetings, retreats to organize, beds to make, talks to prepare, and dishes to wash. Life seemed at times a never ending round of prayer meetings, organizational meetings, talks,

cooking and washing dishes stuffed in between teaching and secretarial responsibilities. But somehow there, amidst confusion, the Spirit worked. People who were so different that they normally would never even have met, began to overlook differences and love one another. Strong, divergent personalities began to have the edges ~~[illegible]~~ smoothed by the Spirit and a real team formed. Many students came to know the Lord and weekly prayer meetings affected around six hundred people: students, teachers, factory workers, house-wives - in short, the people of God - prayed together and forgot that among them there were opposites. Rich and poor, black and white, conservatives and liberals, army officers and draft card burners raised their voices together in praise and thanksgiving and spoke of the Lord as a friend - listening to His voice and following His direction. I prayed, and listened and watched and gave thanks that the Lord was forming His people and that His love was so great.

Then came the time it just didn't seem to be my place there. It seemed the Lord wanted something else - but what? I half-heartedly started looking around for other things but nothing spoke to my heart until one day, quite out of the clear-blue sky, Ralph Martin suggested "Why don't you write to Jean Vanier and see about working at L'Arche?" His wife, Anne had talked a great deal about L'Arche and I always thought it sounded interesting - a good place to visit if ever in Europe. Yet now it took on a different perspective - yes, why not write to Jean Vanier? and why not work at L'Arche?

Even after writing the decision to leave Ann Arbor was not easy - it took time and once working at "L'Arche" the decision to remain was even harder. Much prayer from many people and many hours of

weighing possibilities went into it.* But it seems right with the Spirit that the work He wants to complete in me will be best accomplished here. in living with the poor, in accepting that I too am handicapped, in prayer and in simple service. I feel that the Baptism of the Spirit has helped much and daily gives the force to be faithful to prayer and suffering with those who suffer. It is by no means separated from my daily life and pervades all I do. Sometimes explanation can make it sound unusual or extraordinary. However, I feel the opposite is true. It is completly ordinary - a simple return, on the part of many people, to what man really is: a creature of God who has as his end to praise and love and return to Him with all of his brothers.

* P.S. And the decision wasn't complete until after a month of putting it before Our Lady at Fatima this year.